

Hints and Suggestions

Here are a few notes for the educator to assist in the instruction of map and compass work with students, especially students who have little experience with maps and compasses or travel into the National Parks trails.

Notes for Map Reading:

- The most common error a student will make is not orienting the map correctly. Spend some time with the students helping them understand how to place the map in a way that they can read the map correctly.
 - Have them identify key features that they can see on the map.
 - Many times the students can orient the map simply by identifying key features that they can see.
 - Always have the students' double check if using this method so that they don't falsely identify a landmark such as a building.
 - Have them use the compass and compass rose to orient the map to magnetic north.
 - This will not quite be accurate due to declination, the difference between true north and magnetic north. However, for our purposes, this will get the students close.
 - If you have more time, instruct the students in the difference between true north and magnetic north and how to read the compass to correctly orient the map.
 - Many maps also identify both true north and magnetic north.
- If they are using a compass, make sure that they know how to use it with the map.
- If they are using a topographic map, make sure that they understand how to read the topographic lines on the map.

Notes for travelling on trails:

- When reading maps in the woods, it is important to stay on trails so that the individual does not get lost.
- While it may seem faster to "just go that way" in many cases, these paths take the individual into unsafe areas or can cause damage to the local environment. Mount Rainier includes this as part of their "Don't Be a Meadow Stomper!" program.
- Remind students that they can always find their way back if they stay on a trail rather than travelling off across the landscape while trying to follow the map.
- Trails are well marked on the maps. It is far easier to find one's way on well-established trails than when travelling off the trail.
- In all national parks, there is a "Leave No Trace" philosophy. In simplest terms, the individual who travels on the trails should leave nothing behind to give hint to their having been there, such as trash or damage to the local environment.